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CHAPTER XVI

FISHING AND HUNTING

FISHING and hunting will be discussed only cursorily in these pages. It is, however, necessary just to touch on these activities in order to be able to complete the economic calendar of work. 226

Fishing Methods.

The Bemba cannot be described as a fishing tribe. As a food, fish makes one of their favourite relishes, and is reckoned nearly as great a treat as meat. They catch fish whenever they can, and very much appreciate dried fish, but such food is regarded rather as a sudden piece of luck than as a regular article of diet, and fishing itself in a greater part of the country is an amusing pursuit, particularly when undertaken communally, rather than a serious means of getting one's livelihood. Among the neighbouring [184] Bisa, a fishing tribe living on Lake Bangweolu, each fish is known by name and referred to as such, and every child in the community is able to pick out the different sorts correctly from a heap. But [825] among the Bemba, though different types are recognized by the older men, the rest of the natives just speak of 'fish'. The Bisa regularly dry fish and trade it over the country. They have a fixed [437] system of prices and reckon each catch carefully in terms of financial profit. The Bemba, on the other hand, only sell fish occasionally, at certain seasons of the year, and then by a process of casual barter. Apart from those who live by the banks of big rivers [502] they are indifferent boatmen and handle clumsily the paddles of the dug-out canoes at river fords. Along the Chambesi, Luansenshi, 226 and other big rivers there are, however, definite fishing villages 463 recognized by the natives as such. These villages remain fixed in [361] one position year in year out. Here we find fishing by one method or another going on all the year round, a complex system of ownership of weirs and rights of use of ponds, and special fishing ceremonies such as are not found over the rest of the plateau. The 226 inhabitants of these villages are definitely specialist fishermen, dis- 463 tinguished by name as *umulonga* (plur. *abalonga*) and considered very 823 exclusive and even dour by the rest of the Bemba. The latter discuss the habits of these fishermen as though they were almost a

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226 463 [829] race apart, although in reality they differ from other Bemba merely in regard to their fixed habitation, greater degree of intermarriage, and independence of their neighbours. It will be best to sketch fishing methods in general as they are practised all over the country, and then to describe the more complex type of occupation characteristic of these riverine villages.

221 226 Bemba methods of fishing, whether by trapping, netting, or poisoning, are only successful in shallow waters. For this reason fish are only caught easily during two seasons of the year: (*a*) *April and May*, i.e. at the end of the rains when the waters are falling on the flats and banks, and the fish may be caught returning to the big rivers from the smaller streams and backwaters, where they had gone to breed a few months earlier. (*b*) *September to November*, i.e. when the level of the water in the rivers has fallen to its lowest and trapping or netting is possible in the main body of the stream, and poison can be used in the smaller rivers. Fish may also be caught sometimes on their way upstream to breed in January or February. But in a river as big as the Chambesi fishing of one kind or another is practised all the year round.

The natives recognize no close season for breeding. Questioned as to why they wish to trap fish that are full of eggs or young fish that are undersized, they answer in some such terms as, 'Well, it is no use leaving the fish for some one else to catch, is it?'

(*a*) *Methods.*

226 [278] 324 1. *Fish poisoning.* The simplest method of catching fish is by the use of a stupefying poison known as *ububa*, which is obtained from the crushed leaves of a bushy plant (*Tephrosia*) cultivated especially for the purpose in any village near a stream.[1] Fish poisoning (*ukusungilo buba*) is a co-operative activity in which the whole village, men, women, and children, join, and which is quite unskilled. The whole village may go out together under the orders of the headman, or a group of villagers may plan their own expedition. The best time of year for such fishing is August to November, when the waters are at their lowest.[2] On the smaller rivers such fishing parties are

[1] Mr. E. B. H. Goodall in *Some Wemba Words*, 1921, states that *buba* is used as a collective term to cover all forms of fish poison collected from various roots and leaves, including the cultivated plant, *kowamushi*, and different forest trees and shrubs, but I only heard the name used for the former.

[2] I have known natives try to fish by this method much earlier, i.e. in July and August, but this will depend on the height of the water.

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casual and light-hearted affairs, more like an English picnic than a serious job of work. On one such occasion the company was about twenty or thirty strong, men, women, and children,[1] and carried provisions for a day or two's expedition as well as the baskets of *ububa* and pestles to pound it. On the banks of the river it is common to find remains of grass shelters used on previous expeditions, and little hollows in the ground made by those who had pounded *ububa* leaves there on other occasions. Here the women gathered together in twos and threes, each with a heavy pestle, and stamped the leaves in rhythm. Each trio was composed of near relatives, three sisters, or a mother and daughters, any kinship group in fact that had worked jointly at the cultivation of the *ububa*, and had rights of ownership over it. The women sang special fishing ditties while the men lay idly by and shouted the flirtatious remarks that are typical of activities in which the two sexes co-operate in groups.

When the baskets were filled with the crushed leaves they were carried to the edge of the river. The first day of this communal fishing demands special prayers to the chiefs of the land (*shya-mfumu shye calo*) to open the season. They must be uttered by the headman, often a descendant of the dead chiefs, and at any rate appointed to his position by the present holder of the title. On this occasion the headman was in a state of ritual impurity, so the task devolved on his maternal grandson, a boy of ten, sexually immature and therefore incapable of ceremonial defilement.

He was called on by the eldest man present by the honorific plural *Ba*, and both gravely knelt on the grass with crushed *ububa* in their hands. The old man recited the names of the dead chiefs 'the owners of the land', and then both threw a handful of the crushed leaves into the stream. Every one stood a moment and then the children plunged into the river with the big baskets of *ububa* and began rinsing the contents to and fro in the water (*ukusungila*). The height of the river only stood to the children's waists, the ideal height for fish poisoning.

The *ububa* appeared to dissolve quickly in water since the whole surface was green with it, but it took about half an hour to act on the fish. In fact in some cases I was told the poison is put in overnight.

[1] Only the old people remain behind to watch the babies, and any menstruating women, since the latter are believed to bring ill luck to the fishing, the only Bemba activity which is subject to this common taboo.

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226 The first sign of a fish floating stupefied to the top was greeted with shrieks of excitement. Men waded down into the stream and pronged each fish as it appeared with their fine barbed spears (*ukuela*) while the women caught them in baskets as they floated by. The men admitted that the women's method was more efficient but added, 'We men must not take fish like the women do. *Our* work is to spike the fish with spears.' Most of the village company returned to the village in the afternoon with eight fish of about 1½ lb. between them, but laughing and contented with the day.

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More serious *ububa* expeditions are made on the bigger rivers when temporary weirs are put up across a bend in the stream and fish traps set in these to prevent any stupefied fish being carried down the river. The fishers catch what they can with spears and baskets by day, and return next morning to look at the traps. In the valuable fishing pools near the Chambesi the territorial chief organizes fishing drives. Children use poison in tiny rivulets and catch small fish in them with traps.

226 227 2. *Fish traps.* The second common method of fishing is by trapping. Fish traps are set on the banks of flooded rivers with their mouths towards the stream to catch the fish when they leave the main body of the water in the breeding season, or reversed in the opposite direction to trap the young fish returning from the breeding places to the parent stream. They may also be set in specially constructed dikes or weirs. Trapping is the work of men alone.

The traps (*mono*, plur. *miona*) are of the simplest possible construction and similar to those commonly used by Bantu people, both in Central and South Africa. They consist of reed cones, either with an open end or with a circular disk with a hole in the centre plaited into the aperture to act as a kind of valve to prevent the escape of fish that have been sucked into the cone by the force of the current.

The different types include the tiny traps used by children, about two feet long and five inches in diameter (*tinto*), made by soaking split reeds in the stream for a day or so, tying them at one end, and plaiting them together with bark strands at intervals of about four inches in order to form a flexible cone which remains taut when the open end is fixed between two sticks (cf. diagram 1). They can only be used when the floods are beginning in February and March, and are set overnight by the boys whenever they can find some small eddying current among the grasses on the bank of a stream. They are also used by the girls in the dry weather, in

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September, to catch small fish in rivulets sunk to about two feet wide on miniature fish-poisoning expeditions.

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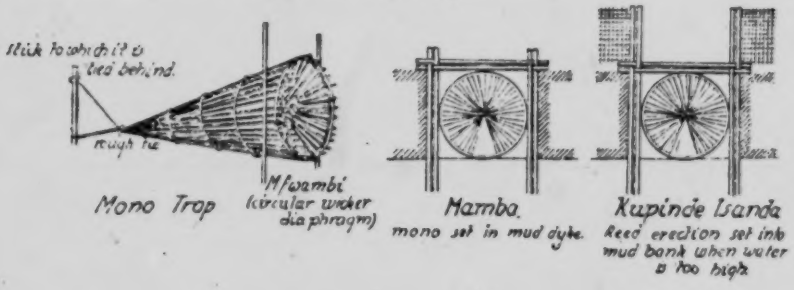

The *mono* proper is between three or four feet long and about one and a half feet in diameter at the widest end which is closed with a valve (*mfwambi*). These traps are made of stouter reeds and must be more securely fixed by means of upright stakes at both ends (diagram 1), and the aperture sometimes concealed by grasses. These traps are set in reeds at the edge of some backwater or in small ditches in flooded flats. They are put out overnight and visited each morning. If any fish have been caught, the apex of the cone is simply untied and emptied out.

Any one can make a *mono* of this kind in a morning and set it where he pleases. But in fact the supply caught by this method is not a large one. They can only be set for a short period at the beginning of the floods and at the end. When the waters are rising swiftly they would be washed away.

3. *Traps set in dikes and weirs* (*ubwamba*, plur. *mamba*). A more serious method of fishing, and one practised only on the big rivers like the Chambesi, is to set the *mono* traps, in dikes (*amamba*) built about one and a half to two feet high of mud and grass sods, either parallel to the river banks, or else across tributary streams or backwaters near their junction with the main river.[1] The *mono* are set in gaps in the mud wall firmly held with wooden uprights and transverse rods (cf. diagram 3), and when the water has become too high in a backwater a reed construction is sometimes built on top of the mud bank to support the trap at a higher level (*ukupinde isande*).

[1] The big mud dikes built across the Chambesi flats near Molema were opened on 3 April 1933, and on the neighbouring backwaters in May.

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[facing p. 334]

A trap set in a mud dike.

A Bemba fish trap.

Net-fishing in the Kalungu River—a small boy holds the bundle of net that is to be stretched across the river.

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226 227 *Mamba* are used (*a*) in backwaters of big rivers (*ifishiba*) in March; (*b*) on the flats about 400 feet from the river edge as the waters fall in April and May; (*c*) in the same dikes, with the traps reversed to catch the fish as they leave the main stream to breed in January, if the rain is not so heavy that it sweeps them away at once (*ukucilule mbelo*); (*d*) in the main body of the stream (*umulongo*) in May, in small rivers only.

Large numbers of fish are only caught by the trap method near the big rivers, but a sufficient number of small fish are picked up by the banks of streams to make a welcome variety in the diet.

4. *Weirs* (*icansa*, plur. *ifyansa*). *Mono* traps may also be set in weirs made of sticks and reeds placed across the big streams where there is a certain amount of current driving the fish into the traps (*uku milongo* or *ku mukuku*). These weirs include: (*a*) the permanent variety, such as are found on the Chambesi River in November and December; (*b*) semi-permanent weirs built to last for three years or so, or until the sand sifts up by the current; (*c*) temporary weirs built hurriedly to block up the current in a big river for a fish poisoning expedition, in which case traps are used. A much bigger variety of *mono* traps, about eight feet long and three feet in diameter, known as *banasabila* or *mumange* are used.[1] These weirs are in use in November and December until the crocodiles become a menace to the fishers. Thus the season is limited, but the method is very simple, and many of the larger varieties of fish are caught.

226 [184] 227 286 5. *Nets* (*amasumbu*). In the main body of a river natives catch fish by nets. Unlike the Bisa, who make about eleven different types of fishing net, the Bemba maintain that they only use one, with the occasional addition of small accessory nets (*akalenge*). The nets are made of twisted bark rope (*ulushishi*). The maker first digs up the roots of the *lwimbi* bush and hammers these out, removing the internal fibres. These he dries and then damps again, and finally frays off fine threads which are rolled together between finger and thumb into a very thin string. This latter is rolled on to a ball and used with a wooden threader to tat the net. [435] It is said to take about three months to make a complete net, which is then four feet deep and twenty-five yards long, and sold for about three shillings. Nets are individually owned, and belong to men only.

226 227 The usual method of net fishing is known as *ukusoa*, the word

[1] I saw these used on the Luansenshi and Chambesi.

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used for driving animals into a hunting net, and the process is in fact very similar. When the waters in the big rivers are low, either in September and October at the beginning of the rains, or in January and February at the end, the nets are stretched across the stream attached to grasses on either bank and kept up by a line of wooden floats (*mpepa*). They hang about three feet below the surface caught down to the bottom with stakes driven in by the foot if the stream is low. On a big river the fisherman, and one or two companions, sets the net and then paddles off down the bank in his canoe for about five hundred yards, turns, and then beats the water up to the net with sticks and shouting. The fish are driven into the net and either entangled in its meshes and pulled out by hand or else speared. The fishers then circle round and drive the opposite side of the net. On the bigger rivers this is a specialist activity, and two or three men set the nets together with a serious concentration of manner. They go out daily and bring back a dozen fish or so for eating or drying. In November big fishing drives are organized by the chief *Nkule* in the fishing pools over which he has rights. But in the smaller rivers (e.g. the Kalungu) I have seen young men playing at net setting in the same light-hearted spirit as that of the *ububa* fishers.

Other types of net-fishing are as follows:

(*a*) Setting the nets overnight (*ukutea ndala*), a method only suitable when the water has not fallen too low (July–October), and in still waters such as the backwaters (*ifishiba*) of the Chambesi near Molema, where neither currents nor crocodiles would sweep away the fish entangled in the nets before morning.

(*b*) Torch fishing (*ukusoe cenga*). This is a method practised in big rivers in December and January, i.e. when the waters are high. The fishers go out in threes and fours carrying flaming torches on the bows of their canoes specially lined with clay for the purpose. The fish come to the top, dazzled by the light, and are speared over the edge of the canoe or driven into the nets.[1]

(*c*) Beating the fish into small nets about one and a half feet long, deep set across flats to catch the fish, leaving the rivers to spawn, i.e. December and January. When the waters stand about three feet high on the flats, men and boys go out in bands, and drive the fish on foot, killing them with sticks or spears (*ukuela*). It will be seen that in the big rivers and their tributaries and

[1] I have only heard this activity described.

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backwaters nets can be set by one method or another practically throughout the year.

Other methods. The Bemba also fish with hooks (*amaloba*) baited with fish and slung on a rope across a big stream, when the waters are low in August, but I never saw this done. Younger men say this method was introduced by the white people since they know that fish hooks are now only to be obtained at European stores. Older fishermen told me that, on the contrary, this type of fishing was practised from the earliest times, and that the Bemba 'always' knew how to make rough iron hooks for the purpose.

A few fish are said to be caught on the Chambesi flats when the floods are falling by means of plaited screens of grass (*uluangwa*) by which the women cut off small fish from the stream, but, indeed, when the waters are drying up at this season odd fish are caught here and there in all sorts of ways. I have often seen casual passers-by step off a raised pathway through fields flooded to a depth of six inches and catch fish of about ½ lb. to 1 lb. in their hands in the grasses, or else spear them (*ukumela*).

To summarize, it can be said that the Bemba who live near the smaller streams of the district are for the most part unskilled fishermen, and rely on the low waters of dried up rivers, and flooded banks to catch a few fish at certain months of the year, but never get sufficient to dry or trade. They have no organized system of exploiting the resources of the rivers or definite leadership in this activity, but catch whatever they can during the breeding season, or before the fish are full grown.[1] In the regular fishing villages, on the other hand, the activity is almost continuous throughout the year. There are four or five different methods of fishing practised, and the men are universally employed in this pursuit. They value their reputation as skilled fishermen and know a considerable amount about the different types of fish caught. Though there is not sufficient fish caught to permit of regular trading, yet it is quite common for a man to be able to pay his 10*s.* tax by sporadic sales of dried fish.

6. *Fishing rights and ceremonies.* Fishing rights, like the rules of use of land, cannot be considered apart from the peoples' beliefs as to the spiritual ownership of food resources. The produce of

[1] How far the people are destroying their supplies of fish by this means does not yet seem clear. Cf. Report on the fish of Lake Bangweolu by C. K. Ricardo and R. J. Jones, December 1936.

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rivers, like that of the bush, is thought to be under the control of the spirits of the land. To secure their blessing the people depend ultimately on their territorial chief, but actually, in the case of any particular expedition, on the headmen of the villages near the streams, whether these latter have succeeded to their title or have been directly appointed by the chief. Fishing ceremonies vary between village and village. The complexity of the magico-religious rites, the position of leadership secured by their performance, and the degree of definition of fishing rights depend directly on the economic value of the supplies.

Thus the headman of a village near a small stream offers prayers to the Land Spirits before an *ububa* expedition, as we have seen. But he is in no sense a leader in the enterprise, nor does his performance at the ceremony entitle him to special economic privileges.[1] Any stranger may join in a fishing party if he asks permission of the headman and gives him a fish or two from his catch. Each fish caught on such an expedition is the property of the man or woman who spears it, and, technically speaking, the headman or the owner of the *ububa* should get tribute from them. In the smaller rivers the supply of fish is so uncertain that most of these dues are not paid. *Mono* traps are set individually in the swamps without the accompaniment of any religious rite, apparently, and the setter of the trap may keep what he catches and put a conditional curse on the *mono*, if he knows one, to prevent fish being stolen. With net

[1] The rites performed at an *ububa* expedition vary in different villages. Molema, headman of one of the specialist fishing villages on the Chambesi, told me that in the old days spirit huts (*nfuba*, sing. *ulufuba*) to the *imipashi* in charge of the waters were built by the river and that the headman opened the season by throwing *ububa* into the stream, calling, 'Let them die! Let the fish that have rotted be white on top of the water' (*Fyafwa! Fyabola fyabute pa menshi tutu!*). This, he said, was to please the *imipashi* (*ukusekeshye mipashi*). When the first fish were caught three were put in the *ulufuba* for the *imipashi*. 'Nowadays,' he added, 'we are Christians. We do not build *nfuba*. We tie knots in the grass instead to imitate (*kupashyana*) an *ulufuba*. That is our sacred place (*E pa musumba!*) where we put the fish. A native of Shiwa Dandu confirmed this form of the rite. He said it was good to joke with the *imipashi* as men do with members of the opposite clan (*Banungwe*) and say to them after calling on them, 'You are the Mpende clan (*mpende* is a big fish that eats little ones, *mpepe*). You eat *mpepe! Muli bene mpende!*) *Mulya ne mpepe!* This is the way men of the Crocodile rag with the fish clan, pretending they are going to eat them, and it is good to joke (*ukucena*) with the *imipashi* in this way. Also it is lucky to get a man who is a notorious drinker to throw in some *ububa* to open the season. Then the fish get drunk as he does. The man shouts, '*Uleke ikolwe bwangu bwangu!*' (May they get drunk quickly, quickly!)

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fishing also, technically speaking, any man can set a net in the smaller rivers, but *de facto* few except the residents are able to do so for want of nets and canoes. Boats are individually owned, and though they may be borrowed, a man who takes a boat and catches fish in it or even kills meat on the opposite side of the river must share his luck with the owner.[1] It is rare to find more than one canoe in a village on a small stream. At the village of the Paramount, where there is much traffic over the Kalungu river, there are only two boats available for crossing and fishing. For this reason the inhabitants of fishing villages in practice have the monopoly of net setting.

In the specialized fishing villages the situation is changed. Magico-religious ritual becomes more complex and is closely associated with rights of use of the river.[2] When I spent some time on the banks of the Chambesi in the territory of Mwaba and Nkula, and even on the Kalungu near the Paramount's village, I constantly heard men being picked out as being lucky fishers, and the phrase 'an expert on boats' (*aleshibishyo bwato*) means not only a man who knows how to handle canoes, but who is reputed to have powerful fishing magic. Here also definite rites of prayer to the Land Spirits must be performed at the opening of the trapping and the netting seasons, and these are in the hands of economic specialists with magic powers (*icibinda*, plur. *ifibinda*) who are at one and the same time the most knowledgeable fishers, the leaders in co-operative enterprise, and the priests of the local deities.[3] This office is strictly hereditary in the line of the man first given the title by the original chief. I never saw any of the fishing rites of the Chambesi, but often heard them described as big gatherings of all the neighbouring villagers who assembled

[1] Large trees fit for boat-making are rare and must sometimes be fetched from a distance, usually after paying tribute to the chief of the district, nowadays 5*s*. per tree. To hollow out a canoe with an axe-head takes a man about two months, or a team of seven or eight men three weeks. The shaping of the prow head, which is merely pointed and not carved or ornamented in any way is the task of specialists who are paid about 3*s*., so that the whole process is an expensive one. It is characteristic of the present Bemba economic system that such boats have to be sold for about £1. 10*s*. in spite of the labour taken to make them. Why? 'Because a man in this country would not find more than £1. 10*s*.'

[2] Even the launching of canoes which is done in the smaller rivers without ceremony has its own special ritual on the Chambesi River (*ukusapiko bwato*).

[3] Specialist elephant hunters with magic powers are also known as *ifibinda*. The priests of local land deities are known as *shimiapepo*. The headmen of the fishing villages combine both functions.

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first to watch the blessing of the traps and the weirs and later to invoke the help of the spirits at the setting of the nets on the big fishing pools (*ifishiba*). On both occasions the priest in charge asks those present if they have any grievance one against the other (*akantu pa mutima*), for the *umupashi* of an injured person might prevent the catching of fish by the rest. He then calls on the name of each of the Land Spirits, strikes the nets to bless them, and says, 'You, our spirits, now we are beginning to work, we people. Give us relish this year that we may eat and be satisfied.' It is important to notice that by the performance of such rites the *icibinda* definitely initiates the fishing season and synchronizes the activities of all the fishermen, and that these ceremonial duties are the basis of important economic privileges, which he maintains in spite of the overlordship of the territorial chief. This balance of interests between the local priest-headman and the chief produces a complicated system of fishing rights.

Permanent weirs are inherited in the matrilineal line and their ownership is often associated with the headmanship of fixed villages. The owner, besides his religious duties, allots trap holes in the weirs to different individuals who set their *miono* there. For instance, in one village the headman had divided the trap holes of a big weir between his sons and brothers, allotting two or three to each. Trap holes may be lent in return for a proportion of the catch, and in some cases a new-comer may obtain the right to build a small mud dike behind the main one giving tribute in return. Setting of nets arranged by casual agreement on the small rivers is strictly prohibited where fishing is valuable, unless the permission of the headman is obtained.

The *icibinda*, besides his right of allotting trap holes and giving permission to set nets, gets a proportion of the catch and also collects tribute for the chief. At one Chambesi village the headman (Molema) got one basket out of every three caught by each individual by the trapping method and two out of every three caught with nets. He sent to the territorial chief (Citimukulu) three baskets a year, two of these on the latter's special demand. In the case of some valuable fishing pools the territorial chiefs have secured special rights and can organize their own fishing expeditions (e.g. at Ca Kandwe, in Nkula's territory).

The sociology of fishing villages. Besides regulating the use of fishing resources this system of rights and ceremonies leaves its

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impression on the structure of the fishing villages. We have seen that the typical Bemba local unit is a loosely organized bilateral kinship group with a constant tendency to split into new communities. Among the fishing villages the value of the economic resources, and particularly the rights of ownership over the *ifishiba*, makes for fixed residence, although a very large village group would make cultivation difficult. New communities therefore divide off, but remain near to and closely attached to the old and under the same leader. Rights of inheritance of fishing weirs strengthen the cohesion of the matrilineal group since succession follows this line, and these Chambesi village communities are matrilineal lineage groups, localized in one district with their male members predominantly of one clan—a more formal kinship structure than usually found elsewhere in Bemba territory.

The headmanship of these villages obviously carries with it pronounced economic advantages. Such appointments are also a matter of great concern to the chief of the territory, who is dependent on the loyalty of these river headmen for his main supply of fish. It thus happens that the Bemba belief in the rule of matrilineal succession to village headmanships, and in the supernatural powers of the head of a local kinship group over the economic resources of a district, is sometimes in conflict with the territorial chief's conception of his own complete overlordship of the whole food supplies of the *icalo*. Under present-day conditions these interests seem equally balanced. The chief's right to appoint headmen in his district has been confirmed under the Native Courts Ordinance, and he does not scruple to use it. I have heard Citimukulu rating the villagers of one of the Chambesi communities, saying, 'You on the Chambesi, you! If you don't bring more tribute I shall chase you away and give the village to some one else.'

A similar attempt of the chief to secure control of valuable fishing resources is seen in the case of the fish-pool known as Ca Kabwe, belonging to the chief Nkula. This pool was originally in charge of two headmen, Sunga Kasawila, and Munwena, but the late Nkula chased them away on account of their 'pride' and installed his own brother in charge, merely keeping the hereditary headmen as *ifibinda* to carry out the necessary fishing rites at the beginning of the season.

But since the local clan group is composed of skilled fishermen who cannot in the last instance be replaced, the history of these

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riverine communities shows that their position is generally secure. The present structure of the Molema group illustrates this fact.

Some Chambesi villages. This group of fishing communities lies on the right bank of the Chambesi near the wooden bridge that used to carry the traffic from Chinsali to Kasama. Here the most important sources of the fish supply are (*a*) the main body of the river itself (*ku milongo*); (*b*) certain backwaters or ponds cut off from the main body of the river (*ifishiba*); (*c*) dikes or weirs built over the wide flats on the river banks. The first headman put in charge of these valuable fisheries was Mulilo, a member of the Lua clan, who was given control of the *ifishiba* at the time of Citimukulu Sampa, i.e. about three generations ago. He was succeeded by his maternal nephew on whose death the then Citimukulu (Ponde) put in a son of his own (the present Mukuikile) to hold the job. The latter failed. He was unpopular. He was an outsider among the Bena Lua. He was not a fisherman and could not perform the annual fishing rites. Temperamentally too he was described as a man who 'did not control his heart sufficiently to found a successful community' (*tatekelo mutima uakwe ua kumone cifulo*). He finally went off to take a job as a cook at Livingstone and the control of the fishing returned to the hands of the Lua clan, and two men in the direct line of matrilineal succession have succeeded to the office of Mulilo. With the growth of this community during four generations three other villages have split off, but have remained under the control of Mulilo. The first village to split off was given to Molema, a brother of the then Mulilo, who was appointed during the reign of Makumba, the first Citimukulu. Two other villages were given to Sampa and Kafoko during the present reign. In this group of four villages three of the headmen (Mulilo, Molema, and Kafoko) are own brothers, while Sampa, though actually their maternal nephew, ranks as their superior since he succeeded to the title of his maternal grandfather and hence became their *nalume*. In this case Mulilo is the senior and gives advice; Molema is the *icibinda* in the sense that he is the luckiest fisher; and Sampa actually utters the prayers during the fishing rites. I know no other case in which four Bemba villages remain united closely together, joining in common economic activities, acknowledging the leadership of one headman, and performing ceremonies to the ancestral spirits together. The value of the fisheries appears to have determined this form of social grouping.

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
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APPENDIX B

Songs Sung During the Ceremony

The following are the songs transcribed during the ceremony witnessed. They represent little more than half of the songs actually sung and less than that proportion of the chisungu songs known by the average *nacimbusa*. The songs are given with literal translation together with the different interpretations offered. These latter are given in some detail as they show the variety of traditional meanings associated with ceremonial songs of this kind. The whole appendix illustrates the point made on p. 164 that the fixity of a form of words or a design allows multiple interpretations without losing the value associated with a 'thing handed down'. The differences in interpretation are either absolute as in the case of song No. 10 or else they are variations in crudity as between the explanations given by the uneducated *nacimbusa* or the educated Bemba. I am indebted to Mr. I. A. Nkonde for a complete set of interpretations of the latter type and for help with some of the translations, and also to Mr. Paul Mushindo and Mr. Kasonde.

No. 1. ***Entering in.*** This is the song sung when the girls are first brought into the chisungu hut (p. 64) crawling on all fours under blankets:

Tuingile shyani?	How are we going in?
Tuingile mipempe;	We are going in as through a tunnel into a dark place;
Nga bakolwe.	We are going in like monkeys.

Interpretation. Mipempe are the grass reeds built to form a narrow passage into the interior of a fishing weir. Hence it conveys the idea of a passage into a secret place, i.e. the secrets of the

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934) 1956
FQ5 Bemba FQ5

881 533 *mbusa*. It is also a passage concealed from the outside world as the girls are concealed from the eyes of the rest of the community under the blankets. Monkeys are represented throughout the chisungu as being enterprising in thefts, usually for the sake of the family.

The immediate interpretation given was that the song meant the hiding of the girls from the village; and that the crawling was meant to make them look ridiculous. I. A. Nkonde gives:

'How shall we go into the ceremony? Shall we enter like monkeys that crawl in in stealth? Thus we show we are forsaking the normal way of life. But we have to go through dark and difficult places before we get wisdom.'

Kasonde says:

'How shall we enter in? We shall enter exposing our buttocks like monkeys.

We are free in the house.

There is nothing secret to us.'

No. 2. Setting the Fish Traps. Sung while making imitation fish traps out of leaves (p. 65):

[539] *Ubwamba bwali bwandi!*	Here is my fishing weir!
Ndetabataba no mono.	I am bustling about to set a fish trap in it.

[226] *Interpretation. Ubwamba* is a fishing dyke built in mud across a backwater. The *mono* is the conical fish trap set in it. *Bwamba* also means nakedness and hence is used as an euphemism for the sex organs. The leaf cups with which the women pretend to catch each others' fingers apparently represent the fish-traps and also the vagina of the woman. Fish appear as symbols of fertility throughout the ceremony and the women mention this in immediate explanation of the relation to the words of the song, i.e. 'The mother says, "The girl was my responsibility, but I cannot teach her everything. I have tried to do so up to now but I have failed and therefore now I have to entrust her to the *nacimbusa* to carry out the ceremony for her. If she refuses it means there is no hope for my girl".'

[195] [831] [842]

No. 3. The Chisungu falls off. Sung after the girls have made their first jump over a faggot bundle and are carried back to the village (p. 66):

The former make millet gardens on such land as is clear of water and subsequently plant mounded cassava. Such a two-year sequence may be continued for several years, but many groups abandon cultivation after the first two years. Village gardens are also planted with cassava, and bananas and pineapples are grown. In such gardens, made on low sandbanks denuded of soil by years of cultivation, cassava seldom grows to full maturity owing to the hunger of the cultivators. Some people make an annual migration to the Lunga plain to plant millet, others barter fish for meal. Very little in the way of subsidiary crops is found beyond a little kaffir corn, some beans and sweet potatoes. In the territory of Chief Kasoma(1) the people make a mass migration to cultivable areas in the dry season, June to November.

The *Twa* cultivate little, relying mainly on their fishing with which they get meal by trading. A certain amount of cassava cultivation is found here and there.

HUNTING AND FISHING

While every Bemba is a hunter by inclination, present shortage of game prevents this desire from being fully gratified. While Melland(2) records the existence of organized hunters' guilds and specialized hunters among the Kaonde these do not at present exist among the Bemba, although elephant hunters formerly were specialists. Hunting by traps and pits is neither an organized nor a specialized activity. Net hunting demands communal effort and is often carried out as a form of divination. There is little information on the hunting activities of the other groups; among the swamp peoples (Unga, Twa, Bisa) hunting is subordinated to fishing but the meat of a certain antelope (*lechwe*) was greatly in demand and these animals were hunted so persistently that a protection law has only prevented, recently, their extinction. There was a certain amount of trade in *lechwe* skins worked in designs.

Fishing is not a major activity, though fish is greatly appreciated as a relish and caught whenever possible. There is no regular trade in fish, nor is fishing a whole-time occupation except for certain groups living on the banks of the larger rivers; where there are definite fishing villages with permanent sites where fishing is carried on all the year round, and there is quite a complex system of pond and weir ownership.

Fish are caught by three chief methods: by poisoning, by weirs and by nets. Poisoning is a communal and unskilled activity carried out at the end of the dry season (August-November). Weirs are only in use in November and December before the crocodiles become a menace. Only one type of net is used, a rectangular variety, stretched across the river, at the beginning and end of the dry season.

It is among the swamp peoples, however - the Unga, Twa and, to a lesser extent, the Bisa - that fishing attains greatest importance. Here the land resources are so depleted, by the over-cultivation of areas which are diminishing in size through increasing inundation, that the growing population

(1) Brelsford, 5, 1946. (2) Melland, 1923.

226 439 must fish or starve. Fish, however, is not only regarded as food, but is also used as an article of trade. The supply in Lake Bangweulu seems to be virtually inexhaustible. The Unga can sell their fish for meal at a good price on the Copperbelt and elsewhere and are therefore unwilling to leave this otherwise undesirable habitat.

226 A number of methods of fishing are employed, such as netting, the setting of lines, trapping fish in baskets set in weirs, catching fish in baskets at low water, and poisoning. The diversity of fishing methods is not as great as it is for instance among the Lozi further south,(1) but since the Unga are able to catch plenty of fish with their traditional technique, improvements of method seem unlikely.

226 423 Netting grounds are available to all, but weirs have a fixed ownership. In certain circumstances a chief may reallocate a weir, but generally the owner has the absolute right of use. He calls in friends and relatives to fish and to repair the weir and each keeps the fish caught in his own basket.

439 Fish may either be sold at the waterside or taken to Kapalala - the ferry over the Luapula at the Congo border - or to the markets on the Copperbelt. A better price is obtainable at the latter but against that has to be set the time involved and expense incurred (such as the purchase of a bicycle or the canoe to Kapalala, and thence by lorry to Ndola). Of those selling at the waterside, some sell to African consumers, some to middlemen, some to Missions and some to representatives of European firms. Many fishermen, however, find their way to Mufulira market on the Copperbelt to market their own fish.(2)

The following figures taken by Brelsford in 1943 from some 250 Unga fishermen show the distribution of their choice:-(3)

64% sold their fish either in Kapalala or Ndola.
12% sold on the mainland at places like Fort Rosebery.
24% sold at the waterside.

CRAFTS

412 Bemba equipment is of the simplest kind. There are only four main implements: an axe-blade, locally forged and fixed into a wooden haft,(4) used for clearing the bush and most other wood-cutting jobs; iron hoe blades, also fixed into wooden hafts, were formerly traded from the Lungu; [411] a spear, locally forged, used in war, hunting and fishing; and, finally the bow, now rarely made. These tools are of the simplest kind, neither carved nor decorated and, generally speaking, crafts are poorly developed. Decorative iron-work, which reached a high level of development among the Luba peoples, hardly exists. 325 Iron-smelting is still practised among the Aushi(5) and was recently revived among the Chishinga(6) group, formerly

(1) Gluckman, 1941. (2) Brelsford, ?, 1947.
(3) Brelsford, 5, 1946, gives a more detailed treatment on the subject.
(4) Mass produced European tools are now superseding the others.
(5) Barnes, 1926.
(6) Brelsford, 7, 1949.

131 towards the Luapula and, in several respects, markedly differing from the surrounding plateau country.

226 The abundance of fish in the Luapula, which is free from rapids and easily navigable below Johnston Falls near the mouth of the Luongo, makes fishing an important economic pursuit in which virtually all the adult male population participate and to which are attached elaborate ritual observances. (see below p.94) Besides being an important item in the native [438] diet, fish constitutes the chief trading asset of the country.

134 On the plateau, where soils are poorer and the population is almost exclusively dependent on agriculture for its livelihood, the shifting
241 *citemene* system of cultivation is the rule. In the valley, however, the rich alluvial deposits make possible a semi-permanent mound cultivation; this removes the necessity for changing village sites periodically and results in a greater stability. Cassava, of little account on the plateau, where finger millet and Kaffir corn predominate, is the staple food crop in the valley.

186 Common traditions accumulated over two centuries, during which the valley constituted the core of Kazembe's kingdom, have made the population conscious and proud of its past.

611 The patrilineal reckoning of descent introduced and established by the Lunda, as well as their tribal heterogeneity, mark the valley peoples off from the matrilineal and ethnically homogeneous neighbouring tribes: the Shila-Katya (north west), Shila (north), Lungu, Chishinga (east), Mukulo, Aushi (south), Lamba (south-west), and Lunetwa (west).

631 The Kazembe is now Paramount over the western (Northern Rhodesia) side of the valley, ruling directly in the province surrounding his capital. His kingdom is divided into eight chiefdoms, ruled by the following chiefs (from Lake Mweru southward): Kambwali, Kanyembo, Kazembe himself, Lukwesa, Lubunda, Kashiba, Mulundu, and Katuta. Sub-chiefs Muyembe and Kapesa administer two districts carved out of the metropolitan chiefdom but cannot hold courts. Lubunda, Mulundu, Katuta and Kapesa are of Chishinga extraction, the others are Lunda.

Kilwa island, with its Swahili chief Nshimba, now falls outside the Kazembe's kingdom.

TRIBAL MIXTURE

166 As a result of piecemeal settlement and frequent inter-marriage the com-
619 ponent tribal groups are as a rule distributed over the whole territory. Local concentrations occur nevertheless: the Shila and Tabwa predominate in the extreme north, the Lungu in the Mulele district, the Chishinga in the Mununshi valley. A Bemba colony occupies land between Lake Mofwe and Lake Mweru granted to Mwamunkupa in return for the assistance given by his brother Mwaba, a Bemba chief, in opposing the invading Bayeke and re-establishing the fugitive Kazembe. On Kilwa island the descendants of Swahili slavers and Nyamwezi copper traders live alongside the aboriginal Shila.

The bulk of the population is made up of the Shila, Lunda, Chishinga,

231 encouraged and there are now a few herds in the valley. Horses and mules are lacking. The donkey ridden by Gamitto when he made his entry in 1830 was the first of the species to be seen in the country.(1) The villagers keep poultry and some small stock, mainly goats and sheep.

FISHING

226 Fish abound in the Luapula, the riverside lagoons and Lakes Mweru and Mofwe. Livingstone collected the vernacular names of thirty-nine species caught in Lake Mweru.(2) Some fishing goes on all the year round but the season, when the men move to the fishing camps on the river islands, extends from September to January. In the shallow marshland pools the fish are speared while laying their eggs. In flowing water they are trapped in conical wickerwork baskets set in rocky falls or in the openings in a weir.(3) On Lake Mweru they are caught from canoes with hook and line. On the Luapula the people go out in their dugouts at night and drive the fish into seine-nets (*ubukonde*) by hitting the surface of the water with wooden discs attached to poles.(4) Large-scale fishing is done with drag-nets (*umukwa*) which require several men to pull them. Formerly nets were made by men from barkcloth cord. Nowadays nylon and cotton nets are used. Vegetable poisons and stupefacients, now banned, were employed in the past.

[177]
[278]

HUNTING

223 Hunting and fowling are spare-time activities. Elephants and buffa-
224 loes, which in Livingstone's time used to be chased into the Mofwe mudflats during the rainy season and killed in great numbers,(5) are no longer found in Kazembe's country though some still remain on the Belgian Congo side.
[411] Large herds of lechwe antelope roam the swamp country beyond the inhabited belt. Fire-arms have displaced the traditional weapons.

DIET

251 The basic foodstuffs are cassava(6) and fish. Game, poultry, fruit
252 and wild bees' honey, supplement the diet. Cassava is soaked in water,
262 peeled and sun-dried for storing. The root, after being pounded and ground
273 on a stone, is made into porridge and flavoured with groundnuts or other relish. Sweet cassava is eaten roasted.(7) Fish is consumed fresh or dried, game fresh or smoked. Fish, when dried in the sun or over a fire, will keep for three months. Water-lily roots, on which, according to tradition, the aboriginal pygmies fed, are considered a delicacy. Native-made alcoholic beverages were millet beer(8) (still made), *Borassus* palm wine, mead(9) and a spirit distilled from maize.(10) Oil is expressed from palm
276 fruit(11) and from groundnuts and vinegar used to be made from bananas.(12) Tobacco is taken as snuff and smoked in pipes.(13) *Bhang* (hemp), was

(1) Burton, op.cit., p.252.
(2) Livingstone, op.cit., p.245.
(3) Brelaford, 2, 194[illegible], pp.70, 71.
(4) Holmes, 1925, p.26.
(5) Livingstone, op.cit., pp.248, 276, 299.
(6) Burton, op.cit., p.40.
(7) ibid., p.101.
(8) ibid., p.43.
(9) Gamitto, II, p.26; Valdez, II, p.246.
(10) Goodrich, p.91.
(11) Livingstone, op.cit., pp.243, 278.
(12) ibid, p.272.
(13) ibid., p.251; Gamitto, I, p.401.

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791 The *ng'anga* (magicians) of whose activity little is known, dwelt in a
778 banana grove just south of the capital which no outsiders could enter on pain of death.(1)

782 Human sacrifices were made at the capital.(2) Victims were prisoners
of war and, failing them, the Kazembe's own subjects. Human blood, hearts
789 and entrails are mentioned among the ingredients of which medicines were
made.(3) Horns containing medicine were supposed to give protection from
787 witchcraft. Before any hazardous enterprise - war, hunting, travel - was
[726] undertaken, an oracle was consulted(4) and, if prospects looked auspicious, a medicine was prepared.(5)

264 The Kazembe was said to receive warnings of hostile machinations in
dreams. If he dreamt of someone more than once this was a sign that the
643 man was plotting against him and must be put to death.(6) Crawford was
787 informed that the Kazembe was ritually insulted during his meals, and he describes this in some detail.(7) "The king eats in a mysterious mode called *kapodio*... The 'old doctors' cursed him while he ate, his face veiled: 'Kazembe should die! He is no man! A beast! Kill the beast, oh! son of Temena (his mother's name)' ". The *mondo* was sounded to let people know that Kazembe was having his meal, and no one else was allowed to eat at the same time.

834 Ritual cleansing is prescribed after sexual intercourse. A man who
783 kills a lion has to be washed in *nshipa* medicine by the headman before he can enter the village, and may not eat or speak till this has been done.

226 A wealth of ritual attached to fishing. Ritual authority was vested
in the Shila "owners of the land".(8) The ceremony of *ukufungule sabi*
789 (unlocking the fish) was performed annually towards the middle of the dry season on all the waters except the Luapula which "belongs to God". Bits of medicine were attached to the nets in order to ensure a good catch and prevent the nets from being torn. Charms were worn by fishermen or suspended at the bows to protect the canoe from being capsized by hippo or
[784] crocodiles. When the canoe was first launched the women sprinkled it with a little cassava flour to ensure plentiful catches. A women, parti-
[834] cularly when carrying a child, was forbidden to step over a net. Sexual relations were tabooed when the fish were being poisoned. Lake Mweru was apparently never crossed south of Kilwa island, according to Livingstone.(9) At the "cursing" ceremony on Lake Mweru the dead men drowned in the lake were called by name and reprimanded.(10) Those who came safe ashore after their boats had foundered were greeted with a deliverance song and led in a thanksgiving procession.(11)

(1) Gamitto, I, p.358.
(2) Pereira puts the number of human victims at twenty a day (Livingstone, I, p.265). This is probably no more trustworthy than is his statement that Kazembe's army numbered 20,000 trained soldiers. R.J. Moore discusses human sacrifices as if at the time he wrote (1937) they were still common and an essential part of the salt-making ritual. The victim, according to him, is "nowadays usually a child".
(3) Burton, p.126.
(4) ibid., p.228.
(5) ibid., p.128.
(6) Livingstone, I, p.277.
(7) Crawford, 2, p.104.
(8) Livingstone, op.cit., p.252.
(9) op.cit., p.269.
(10) Crawford, op.cit., p.105.
(11) ibid., pp.105-6.

7: Richards E-5 (1930-1934) 1940 FQ5 Bemba FQ5

(c) Economic Background. The Bemba are an agri-

cultural people

like most of the Central Bantu group to which they belong. They keep no cattle. Tsetse-fly at present prevents their keeping stock over most of the country, but in any case they seem to have no pastoral traditions, whatever they may have had formerly. Thus they have no means of storing wealth as have the Southern Bantu. Their marriage contracts are fulfilled by service and not by the passage of cattle. In the old days military glory and the extraction of tribute from conquered peoples seems to have been the dominant ambition of the Bemba chiefs, and their wealth consisted in the size of their following and the amount of service they were able to command. This fact profoundly influences their position at the present day (cf. p. 116).

The soil of most of this district is poor and it has not attracted white settlement. The staple crop is finger millet (*eleusine corecana*), while some kafir corn, a little maize, legumes, and pumpkins are also grown. The people practise shifting cultivation of a primitive type, and the plentiful supply of land and the lack of any localized natural resources which might attract the inhabitants to settle in one area rather than another all affect the political system. As has been shown, they decrease the strength of local ties as against political or kinship affiliations, and they account for the fact that the power to distribute land is not an important prerogative of leadership in distinction to conditions in most Southern Bantu tribes.

Hunting and fishing contribute a small share of the food-supply only. Organized marketing does not exist, and under modern conditions no cash crop has been found for this area. This fact, together with the absence of opportunities for local employment, forces the adult male population to look for work outside the tribal area, with resultant effects, as will be seen, on the political system of the tribe.

(*d*) *White Administration*. The type of white administration introduced in this area is described on pp. 112–20.

III. Bases of Authority

The positions of leadership in Bemba society consist of the following offices: (*a*) *territorial rulers* (chiefs and headmen); (*b*) *administrative officers and councillors*; (*c*) *priests, guardians of sacred shrines, and magic specialists with economic functions*; (*d*) *army leaders* in the old days. Succession to all these offices is

7: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1940 FQ5 Bemba FQ5

legal rights of the two rivals, and the rather complex machinery of tribal deliberation on such matters (cf. p. 109) was not called into motion.

The chart also shows clearly the way in which certain chieftainships have also tended to become fixed in different family lines of this main branch of the *Bena yandu* even during the last four generations, i.e. the Mwambaship, the Nkolemfumushiip, the Mpeposhiip in the line of the chieftainess Mukukamfumu, and the Nkulaship, the Cikwandaship, and the Ceweship in the line of Nakasafye. The separation between these two branches will probably become wider and wider with time. In the case of the outlying sub-chieftainships, this separation off of local family lines of the royal clan has proceeded even further. To conclude, there are definite rules of succession according to Bemba kinship but the type of matrilineal succession usually provides two or three possible heirs, and in the case of the bigger chieftainships there are a number of different factors, such as the paramount's control over the more important *ifyalo*, the traditional order of succession to different offices, local feeling in the case of sub-chieftainships, and last, but not by any means a negligible point, the personal qualities of the candidates themselves.

IV. Functions and Prerogatives of Leadership

The functions of the territorial heads, i.e. chiefs and headmen, seem to be derived from two sources—the position of the leader as head of a kinship group and his role as the representative of a line of dead ancestors in a particular district. In the case of a headman, these two aspects are indistinguishable, while the latter predominates where a chief is concerned.

(*a*) *The Headman*. Bemba headmen are described as looking after, keeping, or actually 'herding the people' (*ukuteka bantu*). As senior kinsman of most of the villagers, a headman is responsible for the discipline of the children and young people; he hears cases informally and directs some economic activities. There are few activities carried out by the whole community in common except fishing and hunting, but besides organizing these latter pursuits a good headman initiates each new agricultural process and encourages and criticizes the younger men and women. Land is not often a matter of dispute in this area. The headman does not allot individual plots, but listens to cases should any arise. He is said to

7: Richards E-5 (1930-1934) 1940 FQ5 Bemba FQ5

differ only in degree. All are said to look after their people, to 'work the land', and, with reference to their supernatural powers, to 'spit blessings over the land' (*ukufunga mate*). Their political duties consist in the administration of their capitals and also of their territories as a whole. A large *umusumba* means plenty of coming and going, enough workers for joint enterprises, a large panel of advisers for court cases, many messengers to keep in touch with the surrounding villages—in short, the possibility of keeping the tribal machine running. To maintain and even augment such a community by his popularity and his reputation for generosity is one of the chief's important political tasks. He has also to keep contact with the people widely dispersed over his *icalo* and to appoint new headmen, amalgamate old villages, and decide as to the selection of heirs to old titles. On his success in these last duties the integration of his people as a political unit largely depends.

As a judicial authority, the chief presides over his court with advisers selected from his village, and in the old days he alone could hear charges of witchcraft and, in the case of the greater territorial chiefs, put the accused to the poison ordeal (*mwafi*). In the economic sphere, he initiates agricultural activities by performing the customary ceremony before each begins; he makes big gardens with the aid of tribute labour from which he is able to fill large granaries and thus find the wherewithal to feed his following; he controls directly certain fishing and hunting enterprises: and he criticizes and directs the gardening work of his own villagers.[1]

The ritual duties of a chief consist in the observation of the taboos for the protection of his own person and the safety of the sacred relics at his disposal, and the carrying out of a number of rites for the sake of his whole *icalo*—in the case of the paramount, for the whole tribe. These last consist of economic rites, tree-cutting, sowing, and first-fruit ceremonies, those performed in case of national calamity, and for success in war in the old days. He was formerly bound to protect the people from witches and used to employ a special doctor at his court to destroy, by burning, the bodies of those found guilty of this offence.

In the old days the chief organized military expeditions,

[1] cf. my *Land, Labour, and Diet in Northern Rhodesia* (1939), chap. xiii, for a full account of the chief's economic powers.